'hortus conclusus'

A Series of

mediaeval latin hymns

With Selected English Renderings

PART ONE

ST. AMBROSE OF MILAN

(340-397)

Printed by Stephen A. Hurlbut

AT THE SAINT ALBANS PRESS

Mount St. Alban, Washington, D. C.

1930

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ST. AMBROSE OF MILAN

SAINT AMBROSE of *Milan*, the greatest bishop of his day in the Western Church, has rightly been called "the father of Church song." Born in Gaul, probably at Trèves, 340 A. D., the son of a Roman Prefect, he studied at Rome, and after reaching a high position in the law, was appointed Governor of Northern Italy. Following the death of Auxentius, Bishop of Milan, Ambrose, who had won the respect and affection of both the Catholic and Arian factions, was suddenly and by popular acclaim called to be his successor, and, although only a catechumen at that time, he was baptized and consecrated bishop forthwith.

In that difficult office he showed himself at once gentle and firm. He was no respecter of persons, as was seen from his long and victorious conflict with the Arian Empress Faustina, and in his refusal to allow the Emperor Theodosius to enter the Basilica at Milan until he had done penance for the massacre at Thessalonica. He died on Easter Eve, April 4, 397, thirty-three years before the death of St. Augustine, his famous pupil, whom he himself had baptized at Milan.

It is from Augustine that we learn how, during the siege of Milan by the Arians, Ambrose, in order to comfort and inspire his faithful people, introduced the Eastern practice of antiphonal singing (*Conf.* IX, 15):

Tunc hymni et psalmi ut canerentur secundum morem orientalium partium, ne populus maeroris taedio contabesceret, institutum est. And in another place he testifies to the effect of these hymns on himself (*Conf.* IX, 14): *Quantum flevi in hymnis et canticis tuis, suave sonantis ecclesiae tuae vocibus commotus acriter. Voces illae influebant auribus meis et eliquebatur veritas in cor meum et exaestuebat inde affectus pietatis et currebant lacrimae, et bene mihi erat cum eis.*

Nearly 100 hymns have come down to us written in the typical '*Ambrosian*' metre, but of these less than twenty are considered genuine by modern critics. These are regularly composed of eight 4-line stanzas, and are written in classical *iambic dimeters*, quantitative, without rime, but with frequent elision. Substitutions are allowed in the first and third feet, but the second and fourth are always iambs, with the final syllable *anceps*:

AETĒRNE RĒ | RUM CŌNDITOR
SPLENDŌR PATĒR | NAE GLŌRIAE
DEŪS CREĀ | TOR ŌMNIUM
INTĒNDE QUĪ | REGIS ĪSRAĒL
AETĒRNA CHRĪ | STI MŪNERA

After the second line in each stanza there is usually a 'sense pause'; and there is a more emphatic pause at the end of each stanza; but, most important of all, after each two stanzas there is a sense pause which can only be explained by the fact that the hymns were composed to be sung antiphonally.

Archbishop Trench, in his *Sacred Latin Poetry* (p. 87), speaks of "the almost austere simplicity which characterizes the hymns of St. Ambrose. Only after a while does one learn to feel the grandeur of this unadorned metre, and the profound wisdom of the poet in choosing it. The great objects of faith in their simplest expression are felt by him so sufficient to stir all the deepest affections of the heart, that any attempt to dress them up, to array them in moving language, were merely superfluous. The passion is there, but it is latent and represt, a fire burning inwardly, the glow of an austere enthusiasm, which reveals itself indeed, but not to every careless beholder. Nor do we fail presently to observe how truly these poems belonged to their time, and to the circumstances under which they were produced—how suitably the faith which was in actual conflict with, and was just triumphing over, the powers of this world, found its utterance in hymns such as these, wherein is no softness, perhaps little tenderness; but in place of these a rock-like firmness, the old Roman stoicism transmuted and glorified into that nobler Christian courage, which encountered and at length overcame the world."

Walpole (*Early Latin Hymns*, p. 24) quotes the above and adds: "His hymns are, as we should expect from a man of Ambrose's character and education, sharp-cut, clear, concise, nervous, and strong. And as the themes are high, so the thought is profound."

HYMNUS AD GALLI CANTUM

AETERNE RERUM CONDITOR,
noctem diemque qui regis,
et temporum das tempora,
ut alleves fastidium;

2 Praeco diei iam sonat,
noctis profundae pervigil,
nocturna lux viantibus,
a nocte noctem segregans.

3 Hoc excitatus lucifer
solvit polum caligine,
hoc omnis errorum chorus
vias nocendi deserit.

4 Hoc nauta vires colligit,
pontique mitescunt freta:
hoc ipse petra ecclesiae
canente culpam diluit.

5 Surgamus ergo strenue:
gallus iacentes excitat,
et somnolentos increpat;
gallus negantes arguit.

AT COCK-CROWING

1 *Dread framer of the earth and sky!*
Who dost the circling seasons give!
And all the cheerful change supply
Of alternating morn and eve!

2 *Loud crows the herald of the dawn,*
Awake amid the gloom of night,
And guides the lonely traveller on,
With call prophetic of the light.

3 *Forthwith at this, the darkness chill*
Retreats before the Star of morn;
And from their busy schemes of ill,
The vagrant crews of night return.

4 *Fresh hope, at this, the sailor cheers;*
The waves their stormy strife allay;
The Church's Rock, at this, in tears,
Hastens to wash his guilt away.

5 *Arise ye, then, with one accord!*
Nor longer wrapt in slumber lie;
The cock rebukes all who their Lord
By sloth neglect, by sin deny.

6 Gallo canente spes redit,
aegris salus refunditur,
mucro latronis conditur,
lapsis fides revertitur.

7 Iesu, labantes respice,
et nos videndo corrige;
si respicis, lapsus cadunt,
fletuque culpa solvitur.

8 Tu lux refulge sensibus,
mentisque somnum discute;
te nostra vox primum sonet,
et vota solvamus tibi.

¶ AETERNE RERUM CONDITOR, a hymn at the cock-crowing. Augustine definitely states that this was written by Ambrose: (*Retractationes*, I, 21) 'qui sensus (quod in apostolo Petro tamquam in petra fundata sit ecclesia) etiam cantatur ore multorum in versibus beatissimi Ambrosii, ubi de gallo gallinaceo ait: *hoc ipsa petra ecclesiae canente culpam diluit.*' A passage from Ambrose's prose work *Hexaemeron* affords an excellent commentary on it. § See page 24.

6 *At his clear cry joy springs afresh;*
Health courses through the sick man's veins;
The dagger glides into its sheath;
The fallen soul her faith regains.

7 *Jesu! look on us when we fall;*
One momentary glance of thine
Can from her guilt the soul recall
To tears of penitence divine.

8 *Awake us from false sleep profound,*
And through our senses pour thy light;
Be thy blest name the first we sound
At early morn, the last at night.

¶ The Latin text is found in Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns*, p. 30; Trench, *Sacred Latin Poetry*, 3rd ed. p. 248; Phillimore, *Hundred Best Latin Hymns*, p. 6; Raby, *Christian Latin Poetry*, p. 34; Dreves-Blume, *Ein Jahrtausend lateinischer Hymnendichtung*, p. 8. ¶ The translation is by Edward Caswall, *Hymns & Poems*, p. 5, first published in his *Lyra Catholica*, 1849, except that I have rewritten the second stanza, where Caswall seems to have missed the sense of the last two lines.

HYMNUS MATUTINUS

SPLENDOR PATERNAE GLORIAE
de luce lucem proferens,
lux lucis et fons luminis,
dies dierum illuminans,

2 Verusque sol, illabere
micans nitore perpeti,
iubarque sancti spiritus,
infunde nostris sensibus.

3 Votis vocemus et patrem,
patrem perennis gloriae,
patrem potentis gratiae,
culpam releget lubricam,

4 Informet actus strenuos,
dentem retundat invidi,
casus secundet asperos,
donet gerendi gratiam;

5 Mentem gubernet et regat
casto, fideli corpore;
fides calore ferveat,
fraudis venena nesciat.

MORNING HYMN

1 *O brightness of thy Father's face!*
Refulgent source of light aud grace!
Thou Light of lights! Light's radiant spring!
Thou Day, the day illumining!

2 *Descend, thou very Sun divine!*
With ever-during brilliance shine;
And pour on every sense, we pray,
The Holy Spirit's cloudless ray.

3 *Father! to thee we pay the vow,*
Father of ceaseless glory thou!
Father of mighty grace and name!
O banish every deed of shame!

4 *Direct each word and act aright,*
And blunt the slanderer's tooth of spite;
Assist us in the hour of woe,
And patience to endure bestow.

5 *With kindly governance control*
In chaste and loyal frames the soul;
Let faith with holy fervour glow,
Nor e'er the bane of falsehood know.

6 Christusque nobis sit cibus,
potusque noster sit fides;
laeti bibamus sobriam
ebrietatem spiritus.

7 Laetus dies hic transeat,
pudor sit ut diluculum,
fides velut meridies,
crepusculum mens nesciat.

8 Aurora cursus provehit,
aurora totus prodeat,
in patre totus filius
et totus in verbo pater.

¶ SPLENDOR PATERNAE GLORIAE, is a morning hymn, companion and sequel to the preceding, the authenticity of which is attested by Bp. Fulgentius (468-533): 'Ipsum enim apostolica praedicat auctoritas splendorem gloriae et figuram substantiae Dei: quod sequens beatus Ambrosius in hymno matutino *splendorem paternae gloriae* Filium esse pronuntiat' (*Ep.* xiv, 10). Augustine also (*Conf.* v, 23) plainly alludes to it as the work of Ambrose, without quoting it exactly.

— Part I, Page 10 —

6 *Christ be our sweet and daily food,*
And faith our drink in plenitude;
The Holy Ghost our bosoms bless
With his full cup of holiness.

7 *So let the day in joy move on;*
Our modesty be like the dawn,
Our faith like noon, serene and pure,
No twilight e'er our souls obscure.

8 *See! Morn pursues its shining way;*
Great Morning! all thy beams display:
Son, with the mighty Father, one!
The Father wholly in the Son!

¶ Text in Walpole, p. 35; Phillimore, p. 9; Gaselee, *Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse*, p. 6; Raby, p. 35; Jahrtausend, p. 8. The translation is by J. D. Chambers in *Lauda Syon*, 1857, I, 13. A somewhat altered version by Chambers and Neale in *Collected Hymns of John Mason Neale*, 96. ¶ The ictus tends to lengthen the second syllable of *ebrietatem* in stanza 6, a word which would not otherwise fit into iambic verse. The genitive *dierum* in st. 1 is with the partc. used as an adjective.

HYMNUS VESPERTINUS

DEUS, CREATOR OMNIUM,
polique rector, vestiens
diem decoro lumine,
noctem soporis gratia,

2 Artus solutos ut quies
reddat laboris usui,
mentesque fessas allevet
luctusque solvat anxios,

3 Grates peracto iam die
et noctis exortu preces,
voti reos ut adiuves,
hymnum canentes solvimus.

4 Te cordis ima concinant,
te vox canora concrepet,
te diligat castus amor,
te mens adoret sobria:

5 Ut cum profunda clauserit
diem caligo noctium,
fides tenebras nesciat
et nox fide reluceat.

EVENING HYMN

1 *Maker of all things! God most high!*
Great ruler of the starry sky!
Who, robing day with beauteous light,
Hast clothed in soft repose the night,

2 *That sleep may wearied limbs restore,*
And fit for toil and use once more;
May gently soothe the careworn breast,
And lull our anxious griefs to rest;

3 *We thank thee for the day that's gone,*
We pray thee now the night comes on;
O help us sinners, as we raise
To thee our votive hymn of praise!

4 *To thee our hearts their music bring,*
Thee our united voices sing,
To thee our rapt affections soar,
And thee our chastened souls adore.

5 *So when the parting beams of day*
In evening's shadow fade away,
Let faith no wildering darkness know
But night with faith effulgent glow.

6 Dormire mentem ne sinas,
dormire culpa noverit,
castis fides refrigerans
somni vaporem temperet.

7 Exuta sensu lubrico
te cordis ima somnient,
nec hostis invidi dolo
pavor quietes suscitet.

8 Christum rogemus et Patrem,
Christi Patrisque Spiritum,
unum potens per omnia,
fove precantes, Trinitas.

¶ DEUS CREATOR OMNIUM. This evening hymn of Ambrose is quoted by Augustine in the passage (*Conf.* ix, 32) where he describes the grief he felt after his mother's death: 'Deinde dormivi et evigilavi et non parva ex parte mitigatum inveni dolorem meum, atque ut eram in lecto meo solus, recordatus sum veridicos versus Ambrosii tui; tu es enim *deus creator omnium, etc.*' Again (*Conf.* xi, 35), in that curious argument concerning the subjective nature of time, he cites the

6 *O sleepless ever keep the mind!*
But guilt in lasting slumber bind;
Let faith our purity renew,
And temper sleep's lethargic dew.

7 *From every carnal passion free,*
O may our hearts repose in thee;
Nor envious fiend with harmful snare,
Our rest with sinful terrors scare!

8 *Christ with the Father ever one!*
Spirit, of Father and of Son,
God over all, of mighty sway,
Shield us, great Trinity, we pray.

opening verse as an example of alternating long and short syllables: '*Deus creator omnium*: versus iste octo syllabarum brevibus et longis alternat syllabis: quattuor itaque breves [1, 3, 5, 7] simplae sunt ad quattuor longas [2, 4, 6, 8]. Hae singulae ad illas singulas duplum habent temporis.' ¶ Text in Walpole, p. 46; Phillimore, p. 8; Jahrtausend, p. 9. The translation is by J. D. Chambers, *Lauda Syon*, Pt. I, p. 55. Another in the *English Hymnal*, 49, by Biggs, is exact but prosaic.

IN NATALI DOMINI

INTENDE, QUI REGIS ISRAEL,
super cherubin qui sedes,
adpare Ephrem coram, excita
potentiam tuam et veni.

2 Veni, redemptor gentium,
ostende partum virginis;
miretur omne saeculum:
talis decet partus Deo.

3 Non ex virili semine,
sed mystico spiramine,
verbum Dei factum est caro,
fructusque ventris floruit.

4 Alvus tumescit virginis,
claustrum pudoris permanet,
vexilla virtutum micant;
versatur in templo Deus.

5 Procedat e thalamo suo,
pudoris aula regia,
geminae gigas substantiae,
alacris ut currat viam.

FOR THE NATIVITY

1 *HEAR, O thou shepherd of Israel,*
Who dost above the cherubs dwell,
Appear within thine ancient home,
Stir up thy mighty power, and come!

2 *Come, and display a virgin birth,*
Redeem the nations of the earth;
Let every age the wonder see:
Such birth befits a Deity.

3 *Begotten of no earthly sire,*
But by the Spirit's mystic fire,
The Word of God did flesh assume,
The fruit of Mary's holy womb.

4 *The maiden's sacred burden grows.*
No stain her virgin honor knows;
Her every act of virtue tells,
And God within his temple dwells.

5 *Forth from his chamber let him come,*
Of purity the royal home,
A giant he, of natures twain,
Eager the victor's palm to gain.

6 Egressus eius a Patre,
regressus eius ad Patrem:
excursus usque ad inferos,
recursus ad sedem Dei.

7 Aequalis aeterno Patri,
carnis tropaeo accingere,
infirma nostri corporis
virtute firmans perpeti.

8 Praesepe iam fulget tuum,
lumenque nox spirat novum,
quod nulla nox interpolet,
fideque iugi luceat.

¶ INTENDE, QUI REGIS ISRAEL. The genuineness of this, the earliest Christmas hymn, is more widely attested than any other of Ambrose: by Caelestine, 439; Faustus, d. 492; Facundus, fl. 450; and by Cassiodorus (d. 580), who says, 'Beatus Ambrosius hymnum natalis Domini eloquentiae suae pulcherrimo flore compinxit, ut pius sacerdos festivitate dignum munus offerret, . . . ait enim: *procedat de thalamo suo*, et cetera, quae supra humanum ingenium vir sanctus excoluit.'

6 *Proceeding from the Father's love,*
He turns again to him above;
He fares to lowest depths of hell,
Returns again with God to dwell.

7 *Coëqual with the Father thou,*
With robe of flesh thyself endow;
And with thine own unfailing grace
Strengthen the weakness of our race.

8 *Thy manger gleams with heavenly light,*
Unwonted dawn pervades the night:
O may no night efface its rays,
Shining by faith through endless days.

¶ As many later MSS. omit the first stanza, the hymn is usually known as VENI REDEMPTOR GENTIUM, but without this first stanza, which is surely genuine, the antithesis is lost between *Qui regis Israel* (*Psl.* 80), and *Redemptor gentium.*
¶ Text in Walpole, p. 52; Trench, p. 89; Oxf. Bk. p. 5; Jahrtausend, p. 10. My excuse for presuming to print here a new translation of my own is that former translations lack the first st. and add a doxology not belonging to the hymn.

DE SANCTIS MARTYRIBUS

AETERNA CHRISTI MUNERA
et martyrum victorias,
laudes ferentes debitas,
laetis canamus mentibus.

2 Ecclesiarum principes,
belli triumphales duces,
caelestis aulae milites
et vera mundi lumina,

3 Terrore victo saeculi
poenisque spretis corporis,
mortis sacrae compendio
lucem beatam possident.

4 Traduntur igni martyres
et bestiarum dentibus:
armata saevit ungulis
tortoris insani manus.

5 Nudata pendent viscera,
sanguis sacratus funditur,
sed permanent immobiles
vitae perennis gratia.

THE NOBLE ARMY OF MARTYRS

1 *The eternal gifts of Christ the King,*
The Martyrs' glorious deeds, we sing:
And while due hymns of praise we pay,
Our thankful hearts cast grief away.

2 *The Church in these her princes boasts,*
These victor chiefs of warrior hosts;
The soldiers of the heavenly hall,
The lights that rose on earth for all.

3 *The terrors of the world despised,*
The body's torments lightly prized,
By one brief space of death and pain
Life everlasting they obtain.

4 *To flames the Martyr Saints are haled,*
By teeth of savage beasts assailed:
Against them, armed with ruthless brand
And hooks of steel, their torturers stand.

5 *The mangled frame is tortured sore,*
The holy life-drops freshly pour:
They stand unmoved amidst the strife,
By grace of everlasting life.

6 Devota sanctorum fides,
invicta spes credentium,
perfecta Christi caritas
mundi triumphat principem.

7 In his paterna gloria,
in his voluntas Spiritus,
exultat in his Filius:
caelum repletur gaudio.

8 Te nunc, redemptor, quaesumus,
ut martyrum consortio
iungas precantes servulos
in sempiterna saecula.

¶ AETERNA CHRISTI MUNERA. This, the oldest of the martyr hymns, while not expressly mentioned as Ambrose's by any early author, is accepted as his by the best recent editors: Biragi, *Inni sinceri e carmi di Sant' Ambrogio* (1862), Dreves, *Ambrosius, der Vater des Kirchengesanges*, (1893), and Walpole, *op. cit.* (1922). It is found in the MSS. of the Ambrosian use, and in vocabulary, phraseology and thought it corresponds closely with the prose works of Ambrose.

6 *'Twas thus the yearning faith of Saints,*
The unconquered hope that never faints,
The love of Christ that knows not shame,
The Prince of this world overcame.

7 *In these the Father's glory shone;*
In these the will of God the Son;
In these exults the Holy Ghost;
Through these rejoice the heavenly host.

8 *Redeemer, hear us of thy love,*
That, with the Martyr Host above,
Hereafter, of thine endless grace,
Thy servants also may have place.

¶ As early as the tenth century this hymn was divided into two: one for Festivals of Martyrs, (*st.* 1, 3, 4, 5, 8); the other for Apostles, (*st.* 1 reading *Apostolorum gloriam* in the second line, together with 2, 6, 7, 8); and in this divided form it is still found in the Roman Breviary, (Britt, *Hymns of the Breviary & Missal*, Nr. 158, 154). ¶ I have here combined Dr. Neale's translation of both hymns (*Collected Hymns*, p. 134 and 137). Walpole, p. 105; Trench, p. 212; Jahrt., p. 14.

AMBROSIUS DE GALLI CANTU

¶ The following passage from Ambrose's prose work *Hexaemeron* (V, 88) seems to be based upon his hymn *Ad galli cantum*, and affords an excellent commentary.

¶ Est etiam galli cantus suavis in noctibus, nec solum suavis sed etiam utilis; qui quasi bonus cohabitator et dormientem excitat et sollicitum admonet et viantem solatur, processum noctis canora voce protestans. Hoc canente latro suas relinquit insidias, hoc ipse lucifer excitatus oritur caelumque illuminat; hoc canente maestitiam trepidus nauta deponit, omnisque crebro vespertinis flatibus excitata tempestas et procella mitescit; hoc devotus affectus exsilit ad precandum, legendo munus instaurat; hoc postremo canente ipse ecclesiae petra culpam suam diluit, quam priusquam gallus cantaret negando contraxerat. Istius cantu spes omnibus redit, aegri relevatur incommodum, minuitur dolor vulnerum, febrium flagrantia mitigatur, revertitur fides lapsis, Iesus titubantes respicit, errantes corrigit; denique respexit Petrum et statim error abscessit; pulsa est negatio, secuta confessio.

JESU CORONA VIRGINUM

This short and very beautiful hymn to Christ the heavenly Bridegroom is doubtfully assigned to S. Ambrose by Dreves and Walpole. Gaselee (*Oxf. Bk., note to p. 7*) says: "A faint tendency to rhyme or assonance dissuades me slightly from Ambrosian authorship, but all else is in its favour." Phillimore (p. 9) accepts it. It is based on Is. 28, 5, *in die illa erit Dominus corona gloriae;* Cant. 2, 16, *dilectus meus . . . qui pascitur inter lilia;* and on Apoc. 14, 4, *hi sequuntur Agnum quocumque ierit.*

1 IESU corona virginum
quem mater illa concipit,
quae sola virgo parturit,
haec vota clemens accipe,

2 Qui pascis inter lilia
saeptus choreis virginum,
sponsus decorus gloria
sponsisque reddens praemia.

3 Quocumque pergis, virgines
sequuntur atque laudibus
post te canentes cursitant
hymnosque dulces personant.

4 Te deprecamur, largius
nostris adauge mentibus
nescire prorsus omnia
corruptionis vulnera.

SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN

HYMNUS AD GALLI CANTUM

Aeterne rerum conditor. 4

Dread framer of the earth and sky. 5

Translation by *Edward Caswall.*

HYMNUS MATUTINUS

Splendor paternae gloriae. 8

O brightness of thy Father's face! 9

Translation by *J. D. Chambers.*

HYMNUS VESPERTINUS

Deus creator omnium. 12

Maker of all things! God most high! 13

Translation by *J. D. Chambers.*

IN NATALI DOMINI

Intende qui regis Israel. 16

Hear, O thou shepherd of Israel. 17

Translation by *S. A. H.*

DE SANCTIS MARTYRIBUS

Aeterna Christi munera. 20

The eternal gifts of Christ the King. 21

Translation by *John Mason Neale.*

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